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THE

# VILLAGE SYSTEM,

Being a Scheme for the

GRADUAL

*Abolition of Pauperism,*

AND

IMMEDIATE

*Employment and Provisioning*

OF

## THE PEOPLE.

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BY ROBERT GOURLAY.

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1817.

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# POOR LAWS. (No. 3.)

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## TO THE LABOURING POOR Of Wily Parish.

FELLOW PARISHIONERS,

MY former little Tracts, bearing dates of March, 1815, and February and May, 1816, will testify the settled opinions and views, entertained by me, with regard to the situation and crying necessities of the Poor of England.

In these Tracts, the RIGHT OF PETITIONING has been declared: a practical proof has been recorded, that the most humble may exercise this right, not only with safety, but with ease; and the mode of making it effectual for every good purpose, has been pointed out.

In my last communication, particu'larly, I urged the necessity of immediately petitioning for relief against growing oppressions. I exhorted you "*to spread the knowledge of your right to petition;*" and I said that, as soon as your fellow labourers, in the surrounding parishes, were sensible of this high and omnipotent privilege, I should draw out a Petition, which would exhibit, at one glance, *what is necessary,—what is proper to be done;* and which, if done, would set the whole population of the island to work on double pay.

This was a bold promise; but I now sit down with confidence, to point out the grounds and nature of the Petition, which it is my intention to present for your signature; and

which, I trust, shall be laid before parliament the very day upon which it first assembles.

It will be proper for you to know a little of your own history, and to view it, in comparison, with that of the labouring people of Scotland, before my proposals occupy your attention.

I formerly set forth the great advantage, which the Scotch had over you, from education. A hundred years ago, when the labouring people of England were civilized and truly independent, living in comfort and abundance, the Scotch were rude and uncultivated, many of them im-mured in filth, and existing only by robbery and plunder. The blessed effects of education gradually raised them from this deplorable condition, and enabled them to hold a respectable place in society,—enabled them to acquire property, and thence the greater independence. Such is their simple history, whose reputation for sobriety and worth has gone out to the farthest extremity of the earth.

What has been the history of the English poor in the same period? A hundred years ago, I have said, they were civilized and independent. No people ever lived in greater comfort. At that time rents and taxes were light, and they enjoyed most extensive rights of common. These commons did not exhibit property in the most productive state; but they were a bulwark for independence: they were a resource, which neither the folly nor ignorance of individuals could dissipate.

In the reign of Henry the Eighth, a great seizure of this public property had taken place; but still plenty remained for the wants of the people.

During the last hundred years, encroachments have been made by enclosure on this property of the people, nearly

in proportion as the debt of government increased. While taxation searched the pockets of the rich, the rich, to replenish them, squeezed harder on the means of the poor. Not only was more labour required, to cultivate the fields, but more fields were wanted for cultivation. In fact, the English poor were gradually, and at the same time, oppressed with taxation, and robbed of their common rights, so essential both to individual and national independence.

The poor inhabitants of no one parish could restrain the avarice and power of landlords, armed with acts of parliament, which, alas! these selfish and narrow-minded landlords could frame at will; and the pretence of improved cultivation, forsooth, muffled the villainous encroachment on rights the most sacred.

This encroachment, perhaps, was not systematically intended, either by individuals, or the government, to work its ruinous end; but the deepest design against the independence of the poor, could not have proved more effectual.

Had a general enclosure bill passed, at an early period, while the common rights were visible and strong, government itself would not have dared to alienate these rights. Fate, and the selfish principle, managed more adroitly the extinction of English independence, and the establishment of the present system of pauperism. Taxation preceded enclosure: taxation first weakened the stock of the poor man; and as his stock became feeble, or was annihilated, his rights of common were rendered insignificant, or useless: he became careless about them, and the hand of the spoiler, met with less and less resistance.

Before the American war, and long before parish relief became customary, the fatal influence of taxation and the funding system, was searching out and wasting the best

blood of English independence. That war gave the finishing stroke to the first grand act of impoverishment. It left, indeed, vast tracts of common; but the poor man's stock was gone, wherewith these used to be occupied: the cottages were fast falling to ruin; and there was neither spirit nor strength to repair or rebuild them.

" Ill fares the land, to hast'ning woes a prey,  
" Where wealth accumulates, and men decay."

It was under these circumstances, and at this æra, that the present system of poor laws first began seriously to operate. It is said that, about this time, English magistrates first gave way to over-indulgence of the poor; and this over-indulgence, bears the blame, in the minds of many, for having laid the foundation for all the ills that have since been experienced. Such reasoning is every day deceiving the world. Great and general effects are attributed to partial and secondary causes; and thence most erroneous conclusions are formed. The magistrates of England could not avoid granting relief. A crowd of people, whose moral energies were weak, came to be thrown into a state of idleness, and consequent distress, by the termination of war, or rather by the jugglery of the funding system, which, even then, had broken down the ancient association of peace and plenty. It had, by this time, so far blown up its bubble, supporting great extravagance in the holders of fictitious wealth, at the very time when want of confidence withdrew from substantial stock, that volume, and those energies, which were essential for the maintenance of productive industry. This delusive system gave then a warning of what might be its future results.

Ten years of peace afforded a breathing for freedom; but twenty years of war have finished the work of destruction. Neither property, nor personal liberty, are now known to the poor of England. The system has completely hedged them in from all that is profitable, or pleasant, or natural. To them, the race of life is dreary and dull; with nothing to hope from activity,—nothing to fear from idleness. From them, the exercise of natural affection is taken away: the child owes nothing to the parent; the parent can have no solace nor assistance from the child. Under this horrid system, are we to wonder that the spirit of the people should fail: the wonder is, that it should have kept alive so long.\*

I shall ever maintain, that it is any thing, but the natural disposition of the English people, that has bent them under the cruel yoke of parish bondage. No one, perhaps, had such opportunities as myself, of witnessing their virtuous struggles, in what may be called the last moments of their independence. I travelled, for 15 months together, over England, during the famine of 1800 and 1801, with the sole view of informing myself as to the state of the country. I travelled thousands of miles on foot, and was daily hold-

\* While at Cheltenham during the summer of 1815, for my health, I rode one day to the top of a hill to enjoy one of the richest, most sublime, and beautiful prospects in England. Observing some men at work in a quarry, I entered into conversation with one of them. He had 15s. per week. "You must live well, then," said I, wishing to draw forth remark, "for the labourers in the country below, have only 9s." "They are on the earth" said the quarryman, "but they do not live." I again surveyed the luxuriance of the plain, but, with the association of man pining in the midst of it, enjoyment was gone.

ng converse with the labouring classes. I was employed or two months of this time, by the Board of Agriculture, to go from cottage to cottage, and make the minutest enquiries into the circumstances of the humble occupiers.\* The impressions then imprinted on my heart, of the worth of the English people, can never be obliterated.

I am strongly attached to my own countrymen: most valuable qualities pertain to their character; but circumstances have created these qualities. The Scotch are nobly proud; for they know, that their own personal exertions, can keep them free from the vile shackles of dependence; but there is often in them a conceit—a sourness—a dogmatism, the place of which, is better occupied in the English breast, by diffidence, sweetness of temper, and docility.

The stuff that has been written upon national character, as proceeding from climate and from blood, is past endurance. Give me arbitrary sway over every people, from the Equator to the Poles, and I will make them in every succeeding generation, interchange character through every variety, and from every extreme. Let but the Proposals of this little Tract be put in execution, and this nation of hopeless, dejected, woe-worn paupers, would return in ten years to their pristine strength and respectability: in that short period, they would again be the generous, bold, and independent men of England. .... A little more explanation, and then to the Proposals: a little more comparative history.

\* This journey is noted in the Agricultural State of the Kingdom lately published by the Board: see page 81, where it is said “*The report of that journey was one of the most interesting memoirs, ever laid before the public.*”

The labouring people of Scotland never had property in commons, of any consequence : they never, of course, experienced any deprivation as to property of this kind ; and the same system of taxation has been pressing upon them as upon the English poor.

I have given education credit for making the Scotch what they are. If they had enjoyed originally, equal advantages from common rights, as their neighbours of the South, this would, in all probability, have retarded their improvement. The common rights of England were originally so important, that they created strong local attachments. The people were, by these, linked to their respective parishes; and the bond of affection growing up under the bond of interest, continued strong after the latter was extinct, and rendered the people an easier prey to the slavish system which now prevails, and which holds every man to his parish, neither by interest nor affection, but by the most cruel necessity.

The Scotch, unbound by local interest or benumbing attachments, sought for bread and independence where they were to be found. The Highlander sought them in the Lowlands : the Lowlander sought them besonth the Tweed, or across the ocean. The poor went abroad, and returned rich. The success of these, raised the hopes,—the pride,—the enterprise of their relations and friends; and a continued motion was created in society. It is by motion and change, that nature keeps pure her elements; and by motion, — by wide and unshackled intercourse alone, can mankind retain their independence.

The feudal system too was originally more rigid,—more inveterate in Scotland than in England. The petty lords of the North, had less to spare, as bonny, for their dependent vassals; they had to enforce submission with a harsher

hand; and in slavery, the most cruel tyrant has always the most abject slave. The education of the people foiled and blasted the power of this tyranny at an early period; and now, when the English tenantry must submit to haughty and capricious influences, the Scotch acknowledge no tie, but justice and the laws. Every step that is made by liberty bestows fresh vigour on the succeeding, and diffuses confidence and liberality around; every triumph of despotic power confirms its baneful influence, and tends to extinguish the best feelings of the heart. The continuation of feudal tyranny in England, has aided the advances of the still more loathsome tyranny of the poor laws.

"The landlord" I said, in a former address, "wishes to rule over his tenants, and establishes his rule by making them crouch before him: the tenants thus abject, become more greedy of tyranny where it lies within their reach, and are the more hard-hearted to those below them."\*

I recorded this, and I record it again, as a melancholy fact, of which I have had the fullest experience, not for the sake of throwing odium on the landlords and tenants of England. Human nature every where yields to circumstances, and consequences such as these, unavoidably spring from the present system. Poverty and ignorance draw down oppression, by as sure a law, as gravity draws a stone

\*Out of the numerous instances that have come to my knowledge, of the capricious tyranny exercised over paupers, the following will serve as a specimen, rather too melancholy to be ludicrous: A woman was refused the due legal allowance, because she had neglected *to do obeisance*, as the expression was, to the Overseer, and was further told, that she never should have any, till she *did honor to him as she passed him on the way*.

to the earth. The poverty and ignorance of English labourers, afford no resistance to the incumbent pressure of their masters; while their masters, lowered in the scale of being by the exercise of oppression, are more yielding and submissive to those of still superior authority. Power thus triumphant from above, recoils, reverberates, and redoubles every ill.

There was a time, and it has not long gone by, when English landlords and farmers were the kind and affectionate friends of the poor. What a change has the last twenty years brought about! what a miserable change! Eternal strife now reigns between the master and his servants, and why? because the servant is wholly at the mercy of his master. **DEPENDENCE** is the source of every evil. **INDEPENDENCE** only can bring relief to the English poor.

My poor Fellow Parishioners! the spirit of your forefathers is not yet extinguished in your breasts. You still feel, that as Englishmen you should not be slaves: you still think, that your title to the inheritance of liberty is good, though its very shadow has faded from your sight.

The farmers, at least, have no real advantage from your degradation. They remember, since it was better with the poor, and no worse with them. The greater part, I hope, would still wish to see you comfortable and happy; but they know not how it can be; and I too, might have been equally in the dark, had my experience and opportunities been equally confined. My comparative knowledge of the economy of the two kingdoms, has afforded me reflections, which otherwise might have lain dormant,—reflections which required no superiority of talent to mature; but from which views the most enlivening proceed.

No narrow conception: no half measure: no artificial

contrivance, can root out the evil which has been gathering strength for near a century, and which has finally established the vilest tyranny that ever crushed the liberties of any people.

Many think that the mere removal of taxes would root out this evil : a fallacious error. Taxation chiefly assisted in establishing the system of English poor laws; but the mere cessation of public burdens, would not eradicate the evil, now that it is confirmed by habits, and prejudices, and degradation. The possession of property secured the freedom and independence of the English poor so long ; but the cessation of public burdens would not recover for them that property, nor revive the moral principle, which is even a better guard for freedom, than property.

The growth of taxation did not beat down the labouring people of Scotland. During my observation of thirty years, while taxation was increasing beyond all precedent, I have marked them rising in strength, acquiring property, and making good, year after year, a ratio of pay, increasing upon the increased value of property.

In my first Tract on this subject, I recorded a fact, worthy the consideration of the first statesman of the land, *viz.* that for seven years, while the average yearly pay of a ploughman in Scotland was twenty pounds, and victuals, the average in this country did not exceed twelve pounds, and victuals; and I now couple to this fact, an observation, which should make it of still higher consideration, *viz.* that during the above-mentioned period, while in Scotland, wages were higher, labour was cheaper than in England.

Whence was this, but from the mental superiority of the people, and the circumstances which this had established? The enlightened mind is full of resource, and is for ever

active, both for the gain of the individual and the community. It despairs dependence: it revolts at slavish control: it makes itself respected. It keeps clear the natural course of excitement and exertion; and, if difficulties are great, it rises in its efforts to surmount them.

A nation of enlightened individuals may indeed be crushed by extraordinary misfortunes. The tide of war may overwhelm, the breath of pestilence may destroy, or famine may cause them to perish: nay more, the delusive schemes of Government may bring them to ruin and confusion, but while ordinary events proceed, general prosperity will always be best maintained, by that individual freedom, which results from mental endowment.

For lack of this, chiefly, have the poor of England lost their liberty: for lack of this, have they become the servants of servants,—parish bondsmen, without a word left to bargain even for the wages of their own labour, the reduction of which, by arbitrary power, does any thing but increase either the profit of the farmer, or the general fund for taxation to government.

There was to Government, during war, an advantage from the degradation of the poor; and it is shocking to think, that perhaps for this advantage, was the system of the poor laws fostered and continued. As wretchedness increased at home, the ranks of the army could more easily be filled up. The system of the poor laws was the best possible, at once to secure the monopoly of labour, and of blood.

Advantages are seldom obtained for nothing; and this most wicked advantage has yet to be paid for. The breed-

ing of paupers, so convenient for the supply of the army, is not to cease with the war. The supply will continue, whether there is a demand or not; and something, both more substantial and humane than the proposal of Mr. Malthus, must be resorted to, as a check for redundant population.\*

In addressing myself to my poor fellow parishioners, I must not launch out into discussions and speculations which they could not understand, and which the limits of this Tract cannot admit. The main point for them, is how they are to escape from the fangs of power, not the detail of its machinations to which they have been exposed, nor the crude, unnatural, and little-minded propositions, which have been suggested for their relief.

In our former petition it was stated, that we conceived "It would contribute much to the amelioration of the system, were all regulations concerning it absolutely fixed, and publicly declared by Act of Parliament." From this declaration, some may have thought that we looked to a legislative code for radical redress,—that we hoped by a string of regulations to do away the system. This declaration, however, had nothing more in view, than mere temporary enactment, which indeed, is most grievously wanted.

If the system has reduced the poor to a gallon loaf, and

\* No one ever admired, and valued more highly than I, the beautiful and consolatory hypothesis, established by the industry and sound arguments of Mr. Malthus: but it has always been my regret that he should have given ground for censure, by his proposal to cut off the claims of the poor, without an equivalent. The Edinburgh Review still supports this idea; but let they, who dare, try to put it in execution.

three-pence a week, is it not hard that magistrates and overseers should, without the fear of punishment, fritter down or deny, even that minimum of misery? If the system has deprived the poor of their cottages, is it not hard, that no declaratory law should secure a certain degree of shelter from the inclement blast? Is it not shameful, that the three-pence which two years ago went for clothing, food, and fire should now also have house-rent to defray? \*

When I corresponded with Mr. Methuen about presenting our petition, he informed me, that the subject of the poor laws had "puzzled the wisest men in the kingdom." Alas! in what way, have wise men puzzled themselves? They have not practically attended to the situation of the poor: they have not traced the history of their misfortunes: they have not reflected upon circumstances, which affect human nature, nor made fair comparisons between the various consequences which result from these. They have been afraid to look first-principles in the face: they have been jealous of nature and of truth. I have turned over volumes and volumes on this subject, and so far as *remedy* is concerned, could find common sense in none of them.

\* All these questions, and more in abundance, which my Wiltshire budget could furnish, as to the infringed rights of the poor, respect practical experience and notorious facts. The state of parish cottages is truly shocking, and the principle which sometimes guides the packing of the people into these miserable abodes, may be estimated by strangers, from the speech of an overseer. He would put them so close, he said, that they would be obliged to swarm: meaning, that he would drive them from their parish, by discomfort.

What a world of trouble did Sir Frederick Morton Eden take to puzzle himself, and other wise men, by getting together all sorts of rubbish, without coming to any one practicable idea for relieving the distress, which no doubt he sincerely deplored? What hope is there for the poor in the collections of Bott, and Const, and Nollan, and Burns? Good Providence, deliver us from the wisdom of such men!—from the endless confusions of law! Wise men have puzzled themselves with the study of law, instead of thinking of those things, which would make recourse to law unnecessary.\*

\* The latest author on the poor laws is Wm. Clarkson, esq. I believe a well-meaning man; but nobody can be deeper in the mist, as to the principle upon which the poor should be relieved. After having read my second Tract, he was so obliging as to write me, making offer of his pamphlet, which I had got soon after it was published, as I do all works of the kind when advertised. I replied to Mr. C. that I did not agree with his opinions. He has lately published a second editioo, in the preface to which, he has recommended my plan of petitioning by *single parishes*, and, supported the recommendation with my arguments, almost verbatim. This I should not have noticed, for I am glad to have my notions promulgated, whether I be allowed the credit of originating them or not; but in the said preface, Mr. C. lays claim to the merit of first having called the attention of Parliament to the snbject of the poor laws, which was going too far, when he knew, that the petition from Wily had been presented to both Houses, more than six months before the date of his first publication.

Mr. C. gives receipts for clothing the poor with *backings of tow*, and for feeding them with *Ox cheek soup*, and details I do not know, all what, of petty regulation. It is really surprising, how long mistaken benevolence will trifle with common sense. The poor of England, have suffered sadly from legislative care, and silly interference:

The fundamental laws for relieving the poor in England and Scotland are the same: they are laws which nature and reason dictate; and express no more than the obligation of society to relieve distress,—an obligation prior to promulgated law: but what have circumstances brought about? In Scotland, the labouring classes are not dishonoured with the designation of, *the poor*. The term *poor laws* is never heard of, and pauper suits are unknown. I never knew in Scotland a question started as to settlement; but in every quarter have seen landowners and farmers wishing for the increase of population round them: I never knew an attempt on the part of masters to reduce the rate of wages: I never knew a dispute with regard to servitude, settled by the magistracy: nay, in a very long period of years, while my own father was Justice of Peace in one of the most populous counties of Britain, I cannot recollect above two or three applications to him, for the performance of his public duty, in any way whatever.

Contrast these facts with the dismal experience of this country. Attend the weekly petty sessions of Salisbury but for one day. Look round the crowded court room, and mark the pallid visages and wasted frames of the poor crea-

perhaps half their misfortunes have sprung from the anxiety, so constantly alive in the early acts, for “setting them *to work*.” The poor should have fair opportunities, and be left to their own shifts as to work: they should have general liberty, and then both the precedents of court, and the receipts of public soup kitchens may be put in the fire. *Equalizing the rates* has been long talked of, but it must be talked of again before it is med led and of all things, let not this generation be disgraced with a *national poor office*. Let us get quit both of poor and rates.

tures, come in from the country round, to seek redress against the oppressions of their jolly-looking and red-faced taskmasters. Mark the Worshipful Bench sweating under the duties of law, and, ever and anon, presenting the sacred volume to the lips of him who cannot read a single word of it: wearing to atoms all respect for truth—all reverence for religion, and by the multiplicity of oaths, making perjury as cheap as the cracking of nut-shells.

Does Mr. Methuen think that we must be appalled before the *wisdom* that has conjured up such scenes as these, or that we should be silent if we see absolute and glaring weakness in the schemes even of the *wisest of the wise*? Will he allow me to tell him, that of all the trash that was ever huddled together for the consideration of Parliament, that contained in Mr. Pitt's Bill for the relief of the poor, was perhaps the most absurd and preposterous.

What a monstrous display was his idea of schools of industry, with all this and all that of special enactment, with which it was bedaubed and bedizened? 'There is no need of schools of industry. Give to the people the simple rudiments of education: restore to them that independence which Mr. Pitt assisted so powerfully to take away, and they themselves will make the world at large their school of industry.'

It is not for want of wisdom, commonly so called, that the situation of the poor remains as it is: it is for want of practical experience and reflection in our Rulers: for want of interest,—want of feeling,—want of care. Had Mr. Pitt cared, or felt, or interested himself one hundredth part so much about the condition of the poor,

as he did about the great, and hollow, and ever-to-be lamented schemes of his ambition, he never would have exhibited to the world such a bill as his for their relief; far less would he have dropped their cause, after assuming the charge of it.

Had the present Chancellor of the Exchequer been possessed of the slightest knowledge of the actual situation of the poor, of the laws which govern them, and of the present state of property, he would not have uttered the speech which I quoted at the top of my last number, "*the independence of the poor must be the result of their own exertions.*" By these words, he undoubtedly meant, that through hard labour alone, could they recover their freedom, a thing altogether impossible as matters now stand, and which the most ignorant person in Wily knows full well.

Were the labouring people of Scotland, of whose spirit and exertions I have said so much, transplanted in a body, to take the place now occupied by the poor of England, they could not live independent, under the present system, a single year. Sons would, indeed, fly from its tyranny, but fathers could not, with their utmost economy, exist without the parish dole.

I placed Mr. Vansittart's words at the top of my paper, as a singularly good specimen of parliamentary bombast, in relation to his view of the subject; while at the same time, they were very expressive of what I had to urge as to the *petitioning* of the people. Mr. Vansittart is, I believe, a very honest man, but in these words, every pauper of Wily may judge of his wisdom, as exercised upon the great question of bettering the condition of the poor; and un-

less they think for themselves, and *exert* their constitutional right of making their cause heard, all hope of independence by peaceable means will be vain.

I wish to lay claim to no superior wisdom, though I speak upon this subject with decision. It has been my study for years, and the utmost sincerity has dictated all my endeavours. When I first addressed the labouring people of Wily, I had the same scheme in view which is now to be proposed; but I considered that the cause would be best served by a gradual introduction of it to the attention of Parliament; and as, from the first, I allowed ten years for the full operation of the scheme, it appeared desirable that some regulations should be made to ameliorate the present system of poor laws, while these were still in action: I am still of that opinion; and puzzling as it may have been to wise men, should feel not the smallest difficulty in laying down some simple rules, which would, as the petition set forth, "tend generally to the comfort of all parties;—of magistrates,—of parish officers,—of contributors to parish funds, as well as of persons who draw the whole or part of their maintenance from the same."

It would be far from desirable, to see any legislative act whatever, passed for the amelioration of the system, if such were to prolong its continuance, or to proceed upon principles which should blink the grand point, never to be lost sight of, *viz.* the entire emancipation of the people from parish bondage. The regulations which I should propose would go merely to secure the people in their present rights, while the operation of the scheme gradually raised them above the necessity of resorting to these. Imme-

diate emancipation would not be expedient, even for the people themselves : like convalescent invalids, they should not be too hastily put upon the regimen of perfect health.

In drawing out the petition for Wily, such regulations were merely pointed at, because they would require to be considered in a body by a committee. The special prayer of the petition was of a decided nature: it required no exertion of wisdom: it required but the ear of benevolence; and it set forth an object worthy of enactment, even for its own sake. This prayer required no sacrifice: it sought only for protection against wanton oppression: it pled only for the tender years of youth, and an opportunity for enlightening the minds of the rising generation. How strange that the legislators of a Christian nation should be deaf to such a prayer!

You, my poor fellow parishioners, who joined together in this prayer, must not for a moment be disheartened with neglect. You must gather strength from all sides: every parish must petition; and now that things are getting so fast to ruin and confusion, you must dwell no longer on preparatory measures, nor wait for the result of parliamentary enquiries. The close of last session exhibited a specimen of the internal cogitations of parliament, *viz.* Mr. Curwen's proposal to shift the poor rates from property to income—even to the income of the poor themselves!

Selfishness, infatuation and ignorance, never, perhaps, leagued together to form such a monstrous idea: yet, if it creates disgust,—if it combines the people in their own cause and assures them that nothing is to be expected but from their own exertions, it will do good. Their own exertions only, are wanted to procure what is necessary,—what is proper, that is, in one word, INDEPENDENCE.

This great object, I have steadily held in view from the beginning; and its accomplishment, I never conceived, was to depend on complicated legislative acts. I have long thought that nothing but a fair restoration of property to the English poor, could free them from the present tyranny so degrading to them, and so ruinous to the nation.

The question is, in what way, and to what extent, should this restoration of property proceed. The commons which have been enclosed, cannot again be thrown open without waste and loss, which the nation cannot afford, and no mode of appropriating either those still lying in their original state, or the crown lands, upon which some have cast their eyes for relief, could have either a general, or otherwise desirable, effect.

I have now turned this matter in my mind for sixteen years, and have had various schemes, at various times, in view. What I have now to propose, has stood the test of calm reflection for some years past; and I offer it to the public notice, at a moment, when its adoption seems most peculiarly calculated to allay the greatest distress, and the most serious alarm, that ever pressed upon and threatened the stability of social order.

#### My Proposals are:

1st. That in every parish not comprehended in, nor containing a town of more than one thousand inhabitants, Government shall take possession of one hundred acres of land, being the nearest clear land to the respective parish-churches, and otherwise best suiting the purposes in view.

2d. That Government shall pay to the owners of such land its fair estimated value, raising one half of the whole means for this purpose, by a rate similar to a poor rate,

only that owners of property shall be assessed instead of tenants, these latter being obliged to pay legal interest to the former, during the currency of existing leases, upon the amount of assessment raised from their respective holdings: the other half of the whole means to be obtained by loan, so calculated, as to be liquidated by rents and purchase-money, mentioned below.

3d. That each hundred acres shall be divided into equal parts, as to extent, and in such a manner, as shall best suit purposes in view.

4th. That one of these parts, in each parish, shall be inclosed, and otherwise in the best manner improved, for the purpose of a common pasture, to remain so for ever.

5th. That the other parts shall be divided into half-acre allotments, making one hundred allotments in each parish.

6th. That the present inhabitants, male parishioners, of such parishes, shall be allowed immediately to occupy the allotments, one each: the choice of allotments to proceed by seniority.

7th. That where the present inhabitants of parishes are not sufficiently numerous to occupy all the allotments of their respective parishes, other persons shall have a choice, seniority and proximity giving a preference, while any allotment remains unoccupied.

8th. That each person, when he takes possession of an allotment, shall thereby bind himself to pay forty shillings a year, as rent for the same; and at all times to keep it in good garden culture. A person thus paying rent shall be styled a parish-holder.

9th. That as long as these conditions are fulfilled, no parish-holder shall be disturbed in, nor turned out of his allotment; and at his death, his son may occupy in his

stead, if twenty-one years of age: an elder son having a priority of choice to a younger son; and failing sons, the choice of occupancy shall proceed to the nearest male relation, before it falls to the public.

10th. That as soon as any parish-holder shall have paid into a savings bank, to be for that purpose established by Government, the sum of one hundred pounds, he shall have a cottage built on his allotment to that value; he having the choice of a variety of plans for the construction of the said cottage.

11th. That neither the money deposited in the bank for the above purpose, nor the property of the cottage when built, shall be attachable for debt, nor shall they affect any claim of parochial relief, due by existing laws. A person when possessed of a cottage in this manner, shall be styled a cottage-holder. At his death, his cottage-hold shall go to the nearest heir male, as in the case of the parish-hold, with this difference, that the heir who takes possession shall pay to relations, equally near of kin with himself to the deceased, male and female, or to the nearest of kin female relation or relations, if such there be, nearer than himself to the exclusion of others, a certain value for the cottage; and in case no heir takes possession to fulfil these terms, then they may be fulfilled by other persons who may desire possession, and whose claim to possess, shall be regulated by proximity and seniority: but if neither relations nor others shall claim possession, then the cottage-hold shall revert to Government, from whom, heirs shall receive the value of the cottage, and the cottage-hold shall be open to public purchase or exchange.

12th. That as soon as a cottage-holder shall have had no relief from the parish, for the space of two years, he shall

be entitled to a vote in the parish, and have a right to pasture a cow on the common. He shall be stiled a freeman.

13th. That if a freeman shall throw himself for relief on the parish, he shall lose that designation, his right to vote and pasture; nor shall he recover these, till he has lived five years without parochial aid.

14th. That as soon as a freeman has paid into the bank the sum of sixty pounds, the same shall be received by Government as purchase-money for his allotment, shall free him from the yearly payment of rent, and make him eligible into parish offices. He shall be stiled a parish freeholder. Succession to be regulated as above.

15th. That all sales and exchanges shall be made through public medium; and at once to facilitate and regulate these, there shall be corresponding registries; parochial, district, county, and national.

16th. That no person whatever shall possess either in one or more parishes, more than one holding, and no person shall have a choice, nor be allowed to purchase under twenty-one years of age; but an heir male shall be allowed while a minor, to hold possession, although he shall have no vote, nor be eligible to offices, till he come of age: provided always, that none of the relations entitled as above to a share of the valued property, become chargeable to the parish, while their share is unpaid, nor the heir himself, for, in such cases, the holding shall revert to public possession, and the residue only, if any, of the value of the cottage and freehold, be paid to the heir or heirs, after the parish charges for maintenance, have been deducted.

These proposals will be sufficient to give an idea of my scheme,—its views and principles. I have not been anxious to render them either absolutely complete or correct. I have in my eye many points of importance, and many minor regulations, connected with the scheme, which, if it meets with attention and support, will all come into detail. In the mean time, I trust sufficient is set forth to excite interest, and with a view to obviate every objection, I challenge animadversion and remark. The subject has so long and so often engaged my attention, that I have unmixed hope from the result of its discussion.

My poor fellow parishioners may conceive that my proposals are hard for them. They may think that a labourer who now earns only six or eight shillings a week, will never be able to save oe hundred pounds wherewith to procure a cottage, ten pounds for the purchase of a cow, or sixty pounds beyond that to make good his freehold.

The price of labour, when uncontroled, depends, like the price of other things, on the demand and supply. Were my proposals adopted, the demand for labour would be universal, and the whole machinery of industry would be set in motion: every hand would be wanted: every person would have half an acre of land to improve and cultivate to the best possible advantage. The rich would employ the poor for this purpose; and the poor would execute their own work at spare times, with the utmost economy both to themselves and the community.

The laying out and improving of the parish commons would be another fund of employment; but above all, the erection of the cottages would create the widest and most

lasting demand for labour; and upon what can labour be so well employed?

Although labourers could not, for some time, afford means for the erection of cottages for themselves, there are many thousands of people, and some of these in every parish, who would instantly deposit money for these erections, through the possession of which, and the purchase of their freeholds, they might be qualified to vote, and be eligible to public offices: the building of cottages for the rich would go on for years, and as theirs were completed, those of the more industrious labourers would be commencing; so that a continued demand for labour would be maintained, till *the independence of the poor was the result of their own exertions.*

The most ignorant person in Wily knows very well that the nine shillings, which used to be called the earning of able bodied men, when wheat was twenty shillings per bushel, was a mere nominal rate established by the arbitrary authority of the farmers, for the real pay of these men on an average, putting their wages and parish dole together, cost the farmers fourteen shillings, and the avowed object for establishing the nominal rate of nine shillings, was to influence and keep down the pay of young and unmarried men.\* This most oppressive and unjust combination to con-

\* A noble lord once suggested to me an ingenious mode for defeating this combination against the due rise of wages. I could not at the time make up my mind upon the question, but it gave me infinite satisfaction to think, that a person of rank should cast about for so liberal an object. As an auxiliary measure it might serve

troul wages would at once, with some regulations (which at going off, would be necessary to controul the efforts of prejudice and installed power) be put down under the action of my scheme: wages would not only rise to the natural level at which they should have stood, if uncontrouled, for some years back, viz. about eighteen shillings per week, but while extraordinary circumstances continued to make the demand for labour, greater than the supply, they would rise considerably higher, perhaps to twenty shillings or twenty four shillings per week; and in that case, an industrious man could even at the present high price of corn, if not held down by a large family, lay by twenty or thirty pounds a year, and live comfortably.

Although the keeping down of wages does not immediately benefit the farmer so much as he imagines, and ultimately is much against himself, yet, under the present system, no

but before the propriety of its adoption could be determined, it would require to be considered in union with the whole system of reform. When overseer of Wily I raised the wages from 9s. a week to 10s. in winter, and 12s. in summer, to the relief of the poor-rate, and with the perfect satisfaction of the people; but my successors in office soon reduced the pay to the old rate of 9s. and were supported in this act by the magistrates. I gave a fee to a lawyer for advice, wishing to institute an amicable suit for the settlement of the question of right, as to such acts and authorities, but his opinion was, which I much doubt as to the truth, that no controul could be established. A very simple act, however, would secure this.

How shameful is it, that a *combination* should exist under authority to *keep down* the wages of the most useful and innocent class of labourers, after penal statutes have been made and most rigidly put in force, against *combinations*, on the part of the journeymen of other classes, to *raise wages*!

rise could be much in favour of the labourer. While he has no substantial object, whereon to lay out his gains, and while he can have no hope of permanent independence, increased wages can do little more than prolong his pleasures at the ale-house. How great would be the change, could he see before him an opportunity of possessing a house and garden of his own, of increasing the comfort of his family with the milk of a cow, or, of having the honour of voting in the parish, or still more, that of being chosen to perform its public duties !

There exists in the minds of many men, an absurd and illiberal idea, that the labouring classes can only be controlled by the enfeebling influences of poverty. Nothing can be more untrue. Poverty indeed, does keep them down, and render them submissive to despotic power, while such power is strong and undoubted; but what certain and ultimate security is there for a government, secured by such means ? What if a nation, so governed, be invaded by a foreign power, or thrown into confusion by domestic tumult: on such trying occasions, where rests the bond of allegiance ? The strongest bond to government, is the comfort which individuals experience under it, and the property to, which it has given protection. What in God's name does a pauper of England owe to government ? What invasion,—what change of any sort, could possibly make his situation worse than it is ? It is true, that this nation has long been free of apprehension from invasion or civil war. The funding system, in its progress, strengthened the hands of government: what may it do at its acmé ?

What would be the awful consequence, if this bubble of public confidence was to give way ? if paper tokens were to

fall into discredit, and society was left without a circulating medium? What would be the consequence, if the whole mass of English paupers, who for years have suffered under a system of domestic oppression;—a system, which has engendered the most bitter enmities, and most unnatural feuds in every parish;—which has extinguished feeling, affection, and the regard for truth;—which has left but one principle undisturbed,—the cold, ungenerous, grasping principle of selfishness:—what would be the consequence, if this mass of ignorance, degradation, and revenge, was to burst from the fetters of power? Gracious Heaven, avert from us such awful calamity!

If, however, any man think this impossible: if any man hold light the distress and dangers of the present times: if any man suppose that the nation will easily weather the storms of the year, this day begun, little credit can be given to that man's feelings, and still less to his sense. The perils we have soon to encounter, are great beyond all estimation; and it is not more frightful to reflect on these perils, than it is sickening to behold the puny means employed to avert them, and the vague, wild, and empty proposals which are every day coming forth.

Reform of Parliament is the popular rage of the day, and sure I am, no man ever was more desirous to see this end accomplished than myself; but the question is, can there be any hope that this important measure will be so soon settled, as to bring timely relief to present distress.

For my own part I can see no hope of it; but I can foresee in the struggle to obtain *immediate* reform, so much heat, and so much destruction of opinion, that the passions of a starving multitude are most likely to break in and put an end to all rational argument,—all sober resolve.

The scheme which I now submit, does not rest its merits

on the immediate reform of Parliament, though it would ultimately insure this. It goes to set the people to work, universally: it goes to set before them the most cheering and substantial hope of bettering their condition, and of purchasing liberty, not in the doubtful contest of blood, which has hitherto proved so treacherous to their cause, but by the natural sweat of the face, which was doomed from the beginning, and ever must be, the wholesome earner of their bread.

The execution of the proposed scheme is the simplest thing possible. It leaves no question as to extent or situation: it pounces at once upon its objects, and demands. Some selfish landowners and farmers might growl at the breaking in upon their home grounds, their closes and their crofts, but the magnitude of the public good should not suffer any restraint from such petty obstacles, for a single moment.

We have seen a scheme *hastily written down* by a *wise man*, paid for and adopted by a *most ancient society*, forming the ground of a petition to Parliament, which lay twelve months for signatures on the table of the said society; which scheme had in view, the purchase of some five or six thousand estates of all sizes, from fifty acres, three roods, and one pole, up to five thousand acres, one rood, three poles and a half; all for the accommodation of a single man, in each of as many parishes, and all too requiring to be well stocked with game, for obvious reasons!! We have seen in the Salisbury Journal of this very week, another scheme of a *wise man* (Sir John St. Clair) proposing to have a farm under public management in every parish, for the purpose of giving employment to the poor, whom the farmers can no longer maintain!!!

Under the luxuriant folly of such schemes as these, my *little* scheme takes shelter, and calmly solicits the ear of reason, common sense, and discretion.

To go at once to its general estimate, I shall suppose, and indeed I would wish to see, the number of parishes within the scheme, made up to ten thousand. This would require a million of acres, not a fiftieth part of the territory of the country. These would cost, at one hundred pounds per acre, one hundred millions, not so much as has sometimes been spent in a single year of war; and there would be accommodation afforded for a million of occupiers. The great sum of a hundred millions, would not be thrown away as in war; and the half of it, contributed by the landed interest, would by no means exceed the value of common-rights which, in the process of time, have been stolen from the poor and appropriated to private estates. The outlay of the other half would be gradual; for though the ground for allotments was marked off, at the commencement, it might be taken into possession, and paid for only in the progress of occupation.

Set off the present poor-rates, engrossing a capital of more than one hundred and sixty millions, against this; and suppose that in ten years, by the action of my system, these could be reduced to a mere trifle, perhaps a hundredth part of what they are now, the balance of mere money advantage would be vast, and the sacrifice, on the part of the landed interest, would be many times repaid.

It will be observed above, that I propose that tenants shall pay interest on the assessment of landlords during the currency of existing leases, and being myself a tenant, with a term to run of fourteen years, this fact should

prove at least the sincerity of my opinion that no loss is to be apprehended from the restitution of commons to the public.

By the adoption of my proposals, what would be the infinite benefit, at this particular time, in the way of augmenting the store of provisions before harvest? and never did necessity so much require an expedient for this end. We have had famines in times past, but never was the world at large visited with such general dearth as it is now, the melancholy effects of which will be more and more experienced.

If every man had the opportunity of possessing half an acre of land by the first of March, (and all arrangements could be accomplished before that time,) the poor would have, from the produce of their own labour, exerted at spare hours, a full supply of potatoes and garden stuffs by the first of July. This would completely make up for the deficiency of last harvest; and the assurance that the supply of corn would be equal to the demand, would immediately check the disposition to keep it back on the speculation of extraordinary prices during summer: markets, in fact, would become moderate, as soon as the scheme was confirmed by law, universal joy would dispel the present gloom, and confidence would assume the place of doubt and despondency.

As a permanent establishment, let me ask, in what way could so much land be so profitably occupied, as by these garden allotments, either as to the economy and abundance of production, or taking into consideration the health and general comfort of the people? The cultivation of a garden is what every man is equal to, unassisted, whether he be a common labourer or tradesman; it affords little con-

veniences, which no market can so well supply; and, a species of pleasure singularly congenial to the human mind.

The extent of common-pasture proper to be allowed to a parish, has had my long and frequent reflection. It is neither necessary nor proper, that so much land should be allowed as fully to maintain a cow for each householder. Certain matters of convenience ought to be secured to man in society; but, beyond these, the more dependence he has on individual exertion and fair commerce, so much the better. He was not formed to be an automaton: he was not intended to be controlled too much by systematic arrangement; neither to be the pet of entailed provision, nor the circumscribed slave of sumptuary law. Certain rights,—certain conveniences being secured to him, he should still have necessities sufficient to keep him active; and free from the restraints of individual tyranny, he should still be dependent on society for enjoyment. It would not suit the convenience or disposition of every man, to be troubled with cow keeping. Fifty acres of common-pasture would admit of a considerable number in every parish; and afford as much milk as the women and children might require. This public provision would not prevent more cows from being kept, when the taste of the times run calf-ward, or the men became milk-sops. In short, I will say nothing more on the subject, unless my old friend, Mr. Young, of the Board of Agriculture, is dissatisfied.\*

\* The readers of Mr. Malthus will recollect, that in his *Essay on Population*, he animadverts on the practice of letting cottagers have land for keeping cows, as set forth by a publication in the *Annals of Agriculture*, bearing my name; and in the contents of Mr. Wake-

The appropriating of land for a common in every parish, would be, I conceive, of high importance in other respects, besides that of affording milk. The free use of such, for

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field's Account of Ireland, it stands thus, "Gourlay Mr. his Cow System controverted II. 812. Note." Upon this occasion I think it right to say, that Mr. Young published the Report on the Cow System in his Annals of Agriculture, with my name, without giving me notice, which was unfair; and under the feeling of injury I wrote to Mr. Young, too warmly, a refutation of an attack upon the correctness of a Statistical Table, framed by me for the Board of Agriculture. Mr. Young printed this letter greatly mutilated, altered, and blurred; so that what was not seemly at first, was then much worse; and it closed my correspondence with Mr. Young, much to my regret.

I never did think the system pursued in Lincoln and Rutland, capable of being established by law, or proper for general adoption; but a strong sentiment took hold of my mind, that something was due to the poor of England, for the depredations committed on their rights of common under inclosure acts, and that some substantial remedy should be adopted, to better their condition generally. To mark my uncertainty on this subject, when I wrote the above mentioned letter to Mr. Young, I used the expression, "*a cottage system*" which he altered in the printing to *the cottage system*" and I think it possible, that out of this slight alteration, Mr. Wakefield may have thought me an advocate for what I never was. In my first Tract on the poor laws, published March, 1815, I adverted to the cow system; and intimated that I did not think it practicable. About a month after this was published, I received a letter from a friend of Mr. Wakefield, but a stranger to me, requesting a dozen of copies (which were immediately dispatched) and intimating, that he thought Mr. Wakefield might forward my views: but I had no further communication from that quarter. In the month of May following, Mr. Young published an additional Number to the Annals of Agriculture, which had been long dropped. In this Number he spoke of the cow system, concerning which he had been silent for many years, and observed, that the class of labourers, "never had, and never could petition" which observation I did suspect arose from his having seen my Tract,

the purposes of air and exercise, would contribute much to the health of the people; and were the village commons tastefully ornamented with some shrubbery, and a few trees, which would cost little, the effect, even in tuning the mind to the enjoyment of beauty, and its associations, might be considerable.

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recommending the people to petition for themselves; and in the following Tract, accordingly, I alluded to his observation.

After the volume of the Board of Agriculture, now published, was suppressed last summer, Mr. Young had a letter published in the Farmers' Journal, calling attention to the cow system. What he or the Board of Agriculture would wish to be put in practice as to this, I cannot imagine; but if they can fix upon no certain plan, vague fancies and trifling surmises would better be let alone. They may now see mine, after the subject has engaged my reveries for many years, and after a long and intimate practical experience with the poor laws of England, has made me decide upon it firmly.

I was once an admirer of Mr. Young, and could he resume the manly, the generous, and decisive tone of his earlier years, no one should yet have my higher admiration. He knows how the poor have been robbed of their property. He was the first, feelingly to speak in their cause: let him yet trust to the dictates of the heart. He is religiously disposed: let him remember, that the founder of our religion was bred a labourer; and that by the hands of labourers, he lifted up the banner of truth. Let him call to mind, that this great example of virtue made no distinction of persons; but encouraged even the humblest to put up petitions to the throne of Heaven: with this fact before him, will Mr. Young again throw a damp upon the constitutional right of labourers to petition the legislature.

The benevolent pursuits of Mr. Wakefield, are well known to the public; and since my first acquaintance with him, my respect and esteem have continued unaltered. He may now see my genuine opinions in this Tract; and if controversy can establish the truth more firmly with regard to the most important question of the present day, both as to benevolence and right, I shall be most happy to enter the lists with him.

It may be thought by towns-people, that in all this fine arrangement, there would be no pleasure or profit for them; but here they would find themselves agreeably disappointed. From the nature of things, they could not be accommodated, in point of *conveniences*, as their friends of the country; but if the *rights* of the one were attended to, those of the other would not be forgotten: besides, the industry and prosperity of the country would soon revive the industry of the towns. Tradesmen and manufacturers have been made to set too high a value on foreign commerce. They should know that it is the inland commerce which has chiefly supported them; and that from the general ability of the people of England, can they alone hope again to see prosperity.

The present distress, as it is caused by the delusive effects of the funding system, I shall not dwell upon. The taxation of *idle* property to the relief of industry in general, I have long thought necessary, and the sooner it is resorted to the better; but beyond that, an extraordinary excitement to industry is immediately wanted, and such would be found in the execution of my proposals.

The excitements of war pushed mankind to rare exertions of skill and industry: why should not excitements of peace do as much? Men are not less willing to be active in peace than in war; and mere waste gives no peculiar zest to the faculty of production.

The question is, to fix upon objects which may most profitably employ the people, and which may stimulate their exertions to the highest pitch. These objects, both fit and necessary, are before us: neither nature nor contrivance can hold out any other so desirable. The inferior

animals make it a first object to dig holes and to build nests, for safety and for shelter; but where is the opportunity afforded for an English pauper to provide himself with such comfort or refuge? Where is the spot he can choose for his abode? or, where are the means with which he may establish it?

Under the present system, who is even to *uphold and repair* the cottages of the poor? Landlords have granted leases, and plead their distant interest; while farmers have excuses for neglect still less exceptionable. Affairs have got into such a posture, that it is out of all hope that they can be put right without extraordinary interference; and every thing conspires to decide upon the present, as the auspicious moment, for action.

Fellow parishioners! your cause is such, that if you urge it as you may, it cannot fail of success. Truth and necessity are alike on your side.

Before I lay down my pen, let me once again entreat you to consider of your *right* to petition, the *ease* of doing this, and, above all, the *mode* of proceeding which I have recommended, *viz.* by *single parishes*. If you spread the knowledge of your right to petition, and go systematically to work, all that is wanted will be forthwith granted.

Nothing is hurting more the good cause of Reform than great and irregular meetings. People in power, who dislike the cause, are making their advantage of these: they are spreading alarms and lying reports concerning them, to breed jealousies and to excite terror in the public mind.

I witnessed both the great meetings lately held in London; and the peaceable conduct of the people was much to be

admired. I heard, on the second day, all which Mr. Hunt said, and can truly declare, that not a word of harm fell from his lips, notwithstanding the disgusting stories circulated by newspapers, to injure his character, and through that, the cause of reform.

The people assembled at Spa-fields, knew nothing of the riot in London, which has been made such a handle of, and which, indeed, bears every mark of having been contrived by the enemies of the good cause.\*

\* I visited Beckwith's shop after the depredation committed upon it, and interrogated a shopman, who saw Mr. Platt fired at. He could not say that a single drop of blood had fallen, and I could not trace the slightest mark of any on the floor where he stood. Tapping at the groin, one would think, might make the spring of life flow briskly.

Readers of history know that mock-plots have, before now, made part of the policy of the English Government, to influence and awe public opinion; and readers of newspapers remember, that within these few months, officers of Government have been convicted of inveigling ignorant persons into the commission of capital crimes, that they, as informers, might reap a reward for discovery. Under the management of such men, how easily could all the parts of the late plot have been *got up*, and how little would they care for the hanging of a few deluded fools, to seal John Bull's credulity! The summoning of the Tower, the firing at the lord-mayor, and even the real wounding of Mr. Platt, all form parts, so likely to be played in a great national juggling, that it is impossible, upon a survey of the whole, to avoid suspicion.

The people of Wiltshire, know that I do not join Mr. Hunt in all his sentiments, and the record of it is in the Salisbury Journal of last spring: but how horrible is it to hear people talk against him from the alarms spread by the government press. Since coming to Bath to print this Tract, I have heard a person wish that some one

The whole, however, that has happened, proves, that it is not politic for the people to meet in this way. Their strength is, in order and regularity; and by keeping within their respective parishes, only, can this be maintained. What is a name in a petition, unless it is identified with the residence of the person? Who is to know whether such a name be real or fictitious, unless the identity be confirmed by local connection?

Mr. Hunt proposed to have a petition so long as to reach from Spa-fields to St. Stephen's; but this would only be laughed at, and give the clerks of Parliament more waste parchment to dispose of.

My plan shall be, (if you *exert* yourselves in *spreading the knowledge* of the *right* of every man to petition, and if the surrounding parishes sign the petition which I mean to draw up,) to set forth in a printed paper or book, the Petition, and all the names of subscribers, arranged under that of their respective parishes.

Were such a plan to comprehend the whole county of Wilts, and beyond that, the whole kingdom, which it might very easily do, the friends of the measure petitioned for would know each other: they would know their whole *strength*; and they might compare it with that of those

would *shoot him*, to put an end to the disturbances. What ignorance is this! What has Mr. Hunt to do with the disturbances in Scotland, where thousands who used to earn twenty-five shillings per week, can now only make five or six shillings, and who being neither fed by poor rates, nor willing to subsist on charity, are driven almost to madness by the privations they suffer.

Although we differ with Mr. H. as to the mode of proceeding, we should remember that his meetings are constitutional, and that while he advises peaceable conduct, he deserves the thanks of society.

who remained unfriendly. When ever the strength was clearly proved to be superior, there would be no occasion for fighting: if a child is not obedient, he is whipped.

Fellow parishioners! be assured that the labouring people of this country have it in their power to obtain every rational demand by peaceable means; and thence be firm in your own cause. Spread the knowledge of your right of petitioning: talk of it openly: talk of it loudly; and be not afraid.

Do not regard any authority which would dare to oppose you in the constitutional exercise of this great RIGHT. The middle classes have always been selfish: do not be disheartened if they will not assist. They have always gone aside after "their merchandize and their farms;" and the Great have been as uniformly the worst part of society. It is from the exorbitance of their wealth and influence, that all the evils which afflict mankind, have sprung. Look round here in Wiltshire, and ask yourselves, where is one of them that does good? where is one of them that makes a gracious return for all the rents, and tythes, and taxes, they consume; every farthing of which is produced by the labours of industry? Be not restrained by these men or their meuials. They bind up the hands of the poor with poverty: they darken their minds with ignorance, that they themselves may more safely riot in the spoils of power and oppression; but the day is fast approaching, when the bonds will be loosened and the film will be with-drawn.\*

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\* The people of Wiltshire, who have witnessed the increasing persecutions, which I have suffered among them for many years, may think, that personal feeling prompts me to speak thus strongly against

All that I shall bid you seek for is necessary, and reasonable, and proper. You may tell your fellow-labourers, that it is to establish the VILLAGE SYSTEM, that you are to petition;—that you want nothing more than an opportunity, to purchase by the sweat of your face, the GARDEN, the COTTAGE, the COMMON, the VOTE.

*Robert Gourlay.*

*Deptford-Farm, Wily, Wilts.*

*January 1st. 1817.*

the Great. This is far from being the case. Before I came to Wiltshire, and before I was subject to the oppression of a landlord, I had published the same sentiments, even in stronger language. My treatment, however, from the Duke of Somerset, has been such as ought to be known and recorded as often as occasion offers.

He invited me to come from Scotland to occupy his farm. I was no sooner come than he broke his written agreement, and would submit to no reference. While this breach disabled me from fulfilling my part of the engagement, he seized my stock and sold it. He then forced me into a Chancery suit, which has been kept up for nearly five years. I have beaten him at every point. After obtaining a decree for specific performance, he has delayed this for eighteen months; and after the sum of £1425 has been adjudged to me, besides several years interest on rents, wrongfully exacted, and the costs of three suits, he is withholding payment by every frivolous pretence, while he knows that my farm is destitute of stock by his oppressions, and that my hay is rotting for want of mouths to consume it.

These facts are not the most worthy of public note. The Bath Society, “emanating and comprehending all the landed interest of the West of England,” to use the expression of one of its members, took the part of this man, notoriously to support his character, while he was thus endeavouring to crush his tenant. They refused a tribute offered by me, declaring publicly that they did so, because *I had a quarrel with my landlord*; and in a year afterwards they accepted fifty pounds, from the Duke of Somerset, and elected him vice patron of the Society.

Such facts are worthy of public notice, as marking the spirit of the times; and they will be reflected upon when I and my suffering family are buried beneath the sod. It is notorious that no tenant dare speak out his mind as to political matters: “*If I did so,*” said a very worthy man once to me, “*they (the landlords) would talk of it at their tables, and when I wanted a farm, I should not get one.*”







